

REVISED DRAFT
For Review Only

WORKSHOP REPORT: MCCOMB-VEAZEY

April 30, 2016
Immaculate Heart Cafeteria



Our voice. Our vision.



**EVANGELINE
CORRIDOR
INITIATIVE**

Funded in part by a federal **TIGER** grant

DISTRICT

McComb-Veazey

LOCATION

Immaculate Heart of Mary School & Church Cafeteria – April 30, 2016 (10am – 1pm)

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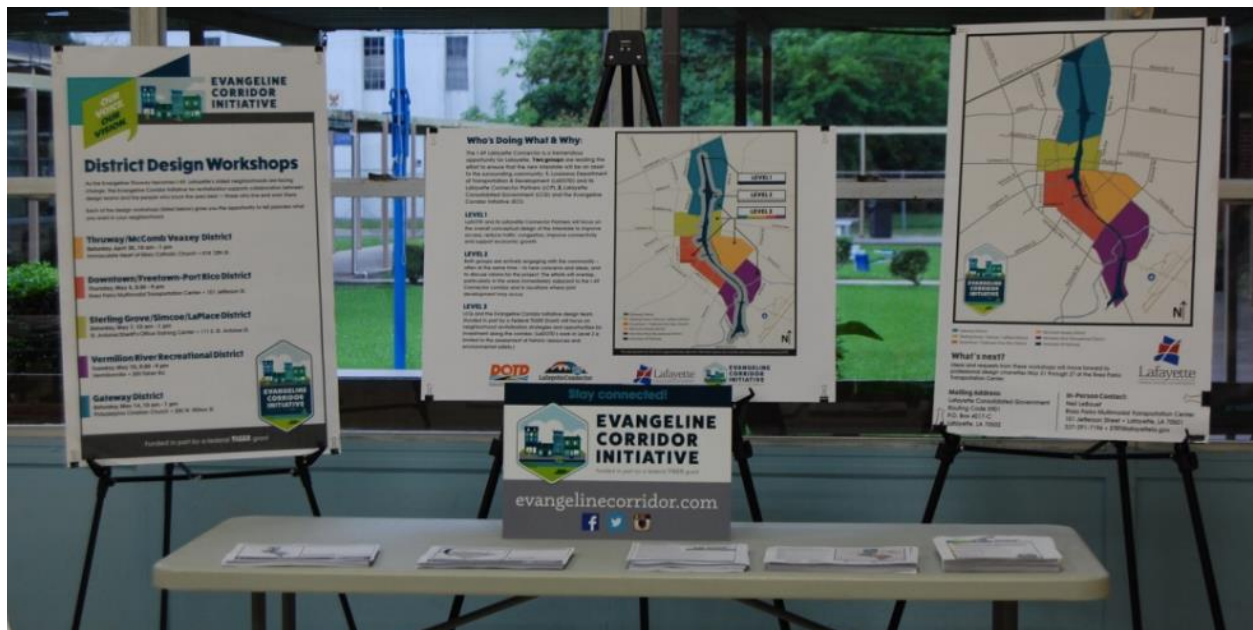
OVERVIEW

The purpose of the District Design Workshops was to bring together the communities adjacent to the existing Evangeline Thruway to lay the groundwork for developing a comprehensive future vision and plan for a renewed Evangeline Corridor. There is a great need for an extensive planning initiative to improve the districts at the neighborhood level, while linking them through a response to the unique environment that will be created by the anticipated I-49 Connector.

This Workshop Report is part of a series of five (5) district-based reports, each highlighting feedback gathered in five (5) separate 3-hour long community outreach events. The report(s) reflect the highly engaged open conversations that capture the concerns, aspirations, and suggestions that surfaced throughout various exercises led by facilitators along with groups of local neighborhood residents, business/property owners, and interested parties.

The report is divided into categories related to the overall planning effort that emerged directly from table conversations and exercises. Based around ideas of opportunities and challenges the elements include but are not limited to *economic development, culture and history, entertainment, safety, infrastructure, beautification, housing, recreation and environment and community*. A final section of the Report focuses on *Connector-Related Feedback* that serves as feedback that is collected by the ECI Team and delivered to the DOTD's Lafayette Connector Partners Team.

Lafayette Consolidated Government and the entire ECI team would like to express great appreciation to all those who participated in the workshops and shared the invaluable feedback that forms the basis of this report. The synthesized information contained herein directly informed the Charrette efforts and ultimately the plans and strategies designed for the neighborhoods and communities of each district.







ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The overall concerns that were heard regarding economic development is the disinvestment in the corridor, and Northside in general, as compared to the rest of the city. Many questioned the attention that the downtown area is getting from developers and wondered if that could not also be brought into the McComb-Veazey neighborhood.

Common themes included the need for incentives to encourage business to locate within the district. Most investors are not locating in this district for fear they will not make the necessary profits. Priority was given by many to small and home based businesses. Concern was voiced that the few developers interested in investing in this area are only wanting to develop shelters and low-income housing. Some ideas for incentives for small business are developing public/private partnerships, matching civic groups with specific neighborhood needs, and utilizing a local credit union or bank that could help these entrepreneurs invest in the local community.

Once a vibrant neighborhood with clinics, banks, hotel and a theater, is now struggling to maintain a commercial/retail presence. Many feel that the current condition of the neighborhood is prohibiting development. Residents expressed their need for daily services provided in their districts. Examples include cleaners, banks, pharmacy and other healthcare. 12th street has been identified by many as the business district. Cross streets of Surrey and 12th Sts. are considered a “hot spot” for recreation, shopping, and dining. Some also identified both Pinhook and Evangeline as retail corridors.

Neighborhood gateways for the district including wayfinding signage were expressed as a desire. Most residents were concerned that many traveling to the area are not aware of the businesses and historic nature of their district. Most of this kind of signage has been concentrated in the downtown area.

Almost every group identified a grocery store as a major need in the district. Most voiced wanting a neighborhood-scale grocery store, while a few indicated a larger grocer like Walmart would be sufficient but needs to be located closer to their neighborhood. Most residents currently shop at the Walmart and Super1 Foods along the Thruway. Since these stores are a far distance for residents without access to transportation, many voiced the need to have the grocery store within walking and biking distance to the community. While dollar stores in the area carry some grocery items, several tables expressed not wanting/needing any additional dollar stores within the district.

Much of the housing stock is older and needs repairs, yet many of the people living in these homes do not have the money necessary to make these repairs. Some participants were concerned about middle income residents moving to and living in the district. They felt that if reinvestment and development does come to the district, the possibility of forcing some of the residents out (gentrification) could cause the district to lose its historic and cultural identity. It was noted that this is a delicate and complex issue to address.

Local Assets

Big Daddy's BBQ
Southern Consumers
Kirk's

Desirable Elements

More Gas Stations

Grocery Store

Healthcare

Intersection of Carmel Ave. and Louisiana Ave would be a nice spot to build up/clean up

Tourism/Visitors Center in the district

More development of 12th Street

Grand boulevard with businesses, festival space (not only downtown for festival), pocket parks, help draw people to the area

More restaurant options – nice family sit-down

Small mixed-use development

Creation of more jobs

“Lafayette invests only on South Lafayette”

“Civic groups are what makes things happen”

SAFETY

Several tables indicated crime as being an issue of concern in their neighborhood. Some that had lived in the area for a while recalled a time when people could go out and not lock their doors. Police patrolled the neighborhood more often and had a better relationship and rapport with the residents. Now, the consensus is it is very unsafe to leave anything unlocked and the police only come in the neighborhoods AFTER the incident happens. More police to monitor the neighborhood more frequently would be helpful to mitigate the crime issues. Simcoe, St. Charles, and Jefferson Sts. were areas of concern for many. Most residents perceived that a lack in activity in an area equated to more crime. Basketball courts were mentioned as bringing trouble and not being adequately kept up with. If more courts are added, they will need an increase in security measures.

The city needs to be more proactive in regard to adjudicated and vacant property, even as simple as maintaining the yards of these properties would improve the overall safety and beautification of the neighborhoods. Some suggested a public/private partnership to tackle these issues.

Homelessness has increased in the area, and while it is still not clear how exactly to deal with the situation, some participants expressed the possibility of needing to add an additional homeless shelter in the surrounding area, especially for women.

Concerns for the safety issues that may arise from an elevated interstate led many participants to suggest a police substation to patrol under the interstate as well as adequate lighting to deter crime. There is a perception that any areas of the interstate that are hidden from plain sight will become unsafe.

Desirable Elements

Organized neighborhood watch

More police patrolling and/or neighborhood/police substation

Better on-street lighting

More camera surveillance

Additional homeless shelter (this was expressed likely as a way to address and not necessarily a desire)

"It's up to me to protect my house."

CULTURE AND HISTORY

Most of the participants had a proud sentiment regarding the district's history and culture. The overwhelming response was a need to preserve and promote the history to ensure it is celebrated and not lost from generation to generation.

The rich musical history of the district came up at most tables with older residents remembering the district's life in the 60s. Ray Charles, Fats Domino, Tina Turner, Guitar Slim, and Cab Calloway were among the musicians named for performing in the district. Zydeco legend Clifton Chenier not only lived in the McComb-Veazey district, but the Blue Angel Club, where he frequently performed, was also located in district.

Local Assets

Mardi Gras – parade route, history of African American Mardi Gras
Historic Homes
Historic History (signage)
Diverse neighborhood aesthetically
Pontiac Point
Immaculate Heart
Jessie Taylor Center
Old Vermilion School
Holy Rosary Institute
Creole Lunch House
Heymann Park (see recreation section below)
Sam's Hotel – historic

Desirable Elements

Driving tour of neighborhood
Something to celebrate zydeco
Cultural business (musical instruments)
Museum – to attract tourists
Turn some of the historic homes into businesses
Further develop music culture
General Mouton bridge – should have a historical marker

"I miss that from back then"

"Kids don't know history of this area... what it was like in the '60s"

RECREATION, NATURAL ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITY

Neighborhood parks, pocket parks, gardening, growing produce and local produce sharing is seen as an asset for the community. Many churches have beds available for planting. Bringing children in to help with the gardens can provide a meaningful educational experience. It was indicated that a “Meet your Neighbor” program has been established which provides boxes of fruit and plants for new people to the area providing a small amount of outreach in the community. Community gardens are favorable and would be a nice addition to 2nd street and Thruway.

Primary recreational assets such as “City Park” (Domingue), Pontiac Point and Heymann Park (see below in more detail) should be cleaned up and improved to enhance their use for the community as well as make connections to Vermilionville area (see notes in Vermilion District Report).

Heymann Park used to be and could once again serve as a huge and wide-ranging community asset. Technically outside the McComb-Veazey boundary as drawn, it is a large, mostly functional park adjacent to the neighborhood. Many people feel the park is underused, and could be improved and modernized in various ways – some general, some specific. It was widely acknowledged that activity should and could be increased, but safety is an issue and the park needs better patrolling and attention now and in the future if it is redeveloped. Basketball courts were recently upgraded but bring trouble in some instances. Elements and activities of the park that could see improvement are listed below.

There is general consensus that kids are looking for and need more activities. Currently, there is a lack of things to do. This will keep them out of trouble and off the streets. Kids are lingering in the streets because there are no cost friendly programs for kids. The demand/want/need is there and it would be well received. Ideally close to their homes so they could get to it on their own by bike or foot. An example of something that occurs now is “The Green House” – a program that supplies travel and transportation to take people to do things, like bingo, movies, luncheons and visits to the library.

In terms of community-wide aspirations, education was mentioned as a key element for community building. It was suggested that more partnership and engagement be made with Northside High School students and faculty. The potential for a local library and more “little libraries” like the one at Immaculate Heart were desirable. After-school tutoring programs should be expanded and Heymann Park or a recreation center at Old Gethsemane could host this (see below in desires).

Local Assets

Heymann Park

Family Culture

Significant history of McComb-Veazey district

Desirable Elements

Would like to add a farmer’s market.

Make community gardens on Pinhook and add citrus trees and other edibles.

Cattle barn and pen that was there would also be a good community garden spot.

Need a Boys and Girls Club.

Cycling, swimming options (O.J. Mouton Pool is not far away).

Smaller pocket parks – possibly on St. Charles and/or Magnolia St.

Old Gethsemane property converted to a community recreation center/daycare.

Front porch parties (block party).

HEYMANN PARK

- Fishing dock at Heymann Park
- Dedicated skateboarding area
- The outdoor track and walking trails that connect to other things
- Ample parking and street access (road is narrow and not inviting and have to cross a ditch)
- Better tennis courts
- Revamp pool
- Fitness/bike path/aerobic classes
- BBQs with their families and games (football, softball, etc.)
- New Splash Pad
- More indoor basketball courts
- New Pavilions

Challenges

Community feels forgotten and neglected

Distrust of city government – need to be more proactive in identifying and correcting problems

Evangeline Thruway has caused a racial divide

Perception of a disinvestment as compared to other parts of Lafayette (northside vs southside)

Academic grading system problematic – labels schools causing kids to leave the area

“We want public property back.” “It is not where you live, it is how you live.”

HOUSING

Several concerns related to housing were voiced during the workshop. Habitat for Humanity was mentioned often as providing a great service for the neighborhood, however it was noted this is only one option currently available. Some residents mentioned that there are housing rehab programs offered by the city, but wished the city would be more transparent and forthcoming with this information while some participants simply felt that these programs do not work.

Many participants indicated a need for the city to be more proactive in regard to adjudicated and vacant property. Not only is this a safety concern, as previously mentioned in this report, but it could also be an opportunity for home ownership for those that want to live in the district. Low income residents may also struggle with the cost necessary to maintain or rehab their homes. Some suggested a public/private partnership to tackle these issues.

Overall, most residents expressed the need to protect current community members. They felt that an appropriate mix of home owners, renters, affordable housing, and rehab assistance programs was the most effective way to address the housing needs in the community without bringing a negative stigma like can often be the result Section 8 housing has on a community. Slumlords were also brought up as well as potential ways to deal with them, for example enforcing building standards.

Local Assets

Historic homes
Sense of community

Desirable Elements

Transparency and consistency from the city on housing assistance programs
More effective ways to deal with adjudicated and vacant property
Housing rehab assistance program
More representation for neighborhoods for conscientious development and affordable housing (participants pointed to organizations like DDA and One Acadiana (likely expressed as a desire for inclusion)

Challenges

Rental tenants do not care about homes so upkeep is often not a priority for them (this was expressed)

ENTERTAINMENT (COMMERCIAL)

Entertainment options were mentioned as lacking in the McComb-Veazey district. Many participants wanted entertainment options for kids after school and football games. As these young people get older many leave the neighborhood. This was attributed to the lack of entertainment options and things to do.

Many residents voiced a resistance to more bars and liquor/tobacco stores in the neighborhood. It was said that too many of these uses creates a bad atmosphere and undesirable activity.

Local Assets

Movie in the Park – held 6 months ago across from church, may need to be relocated

Desirable Elements

Extend festival from Downtown to McComb-Veazey neighborhood
Movie theater, bowling alley,
No more liquor stores or bars
Basketball court on reimagined Evangeline Thruway
Downtown Alive, when it rains, on reimagined Evangeline Thruway

BEAUTIFICATION

Neighborhood beautification was deemed very important and some beautification efforts are currently underway in the district. Many opportunities for public art were mentioned in addition to the murals that have recently been installed.

Landscaping and street trees were mentioned as a means to beautify the neighborhood. The restoration of the Azalea Trail was mentioned as a community asset. Other members of the community expressed the desire to extend the streetscape beautification that has been done on Jefferson Street downtown across the Thruway and into the McComb-Veazey neighborhood. Some residents voiced a concern for

who would be responsible for maintenance of additional street trees and landscaping. The participants wanted these additions to the neighborhood, but also wanted to ensure that proper maintenance would keep these efforts looking nice and a continued asset to the district.

The desire for community gardens, district parks, and neighborhood parks was mentioned at most of the tables during the workshop. Many residents had ideas of empty lots within the neighborhood that would be perfect for pocket parks and/or community gardens.

Also mentioned during the workshop was a concern regarding the I-49 connector and the visual disruption it may cause to the neighborhood.

Litter and overall dilapidated nature of the district was brought up numerous times. Several participants indicated that trashcans used to be provided in the district and were dealt with by the city. There was a common concern on the state of the environment, including self-policing of the litter issues. It was mentioned by more than one participant that abandoned homes, overgrown lots, and an overwhelming amount of litter and trash is becoming a major concern throughout parts of the district.

Local Assets

Beautiful mature trees
Heymann Park (see recreation above)
Pontiac Point
Murals

Desirable Elements

Restore the Azalea Trail, which used to be a feature of Jefferson Blvd.
Connect with school and civic groups to give young people the opportunity to contribute to beautification
Tree maintenance
More public art – engage artists in the district (bus stops, utility boxes, bike paths, positive graffiti (graffiti walls) were all mentioned as opportunities for creative art)
Parks
Improve streetscape with on-street parking and street trees along 12th Street, Moss and Surrey Sts.
Neighborhood Gateway signage - colored flags and benches, walking maps
Put the boulevard back
Alleys need to be abandoned because they are a gathering place for junk and trash

Challenges

Perception that city is not policing litter and dilapidated housing issues
Alleys becoming gathering places for junk
Environmental:

- Filling station near St. Genevieve Church is a contaminated site and needs to be addressed. Perception of the community is they are not being told what is happening there.
- Community wants potentially contaminated sites identified on a map and an explanation of environmental hazards

“Clean up abandoned houses and cars, set up a program to have someone from the city to come get it out of there”

INFRASTRUCTURE

Several Infrastructure issues came up during the workshop. While most could be attributed to poor maintenance, some of the issues related to street infrastructure may be dealt with converting to a complete street as a beautification effort. In general, the quality of streets was not at an acceptable level according to many community members. Many streets are lacking sidewalks on at least one side, if not both, and in some situations the existing sidewalks need repair and are not adequate for pedestrian traffic.

Drainage was identified as being a major issue by a number of participants. Most of the drainage problems and flooded streets were attributed to the drains needing to be maintained and cleaned out. Lighting was also identified as needing to be properly maintained and potentially adding more street lighting in some areas.

Heavy traffic is disrupting the neighborhood causing safety concerns. Some residents felt the speed bumps have helped the issue, while others felt that additional speed bumps or other traffic calming measures are necessary. Many residents felt that the increased speeds made safe pedestrian activity and access across busier streets very difficult. Slowing traffic was identified as a major concern as it relates to safety, connectivity, and recreation of children in the neighborhood. Decreasing the speeds will also deter cut through traffic which was voiced as an issue.

Desirable Elements

Need for 4-way stops, need more bike lanes for safe cycling access
More signs for school bus stops to slow moving traffic for children playing
Speed limits, not enough stop signs/speed bumps, frustration about outside traffic cutting through neighborhood
Protection for pedestrians and cyclists
Crossing Louisiana Avenue safely and other major roads

ACCESS/MOBILITY/CONNECTIVITY

There is a general sense that the Thruway and railroad makes these neighborhoods secluded from other parts of the city. Traffic on the Thruway makes it difficult and unsafe for pedestrians and bicyclists to cross. This lack of connectivity was mentioned as prohibiting residents without access to transportation the ability to get some of their daily needs met, like getting groceries.

More connectivity to downtown via automobile, bike, and by foot was a common comment heard during the workshop. Several participants had ideas of how this could be accomplished. Main arterials identified for connectivity to the Downtown include 12th „ Jefferson, 6th , 14th and Taft Sts. Others felt that if a “road diet” was put it to place, traffic reduced, and more controlled and safe crossings created, streets such as Johnston/Louisiana Avenue and Pinhook could be viable main street options.

Many participants liked the designated bike paths that make it easier for them to access areas like the church and park. Extending the bike path along 6th Street to connect to the Downtown area was even suggested. A few stakeholders felt that the bike paths were disruptive to vehicular traffic and wanted them to be removed. Several participants expressed destinations they would ideally like to extend the bike paths and also expressed the need to better identify and protect the paths.

During the workshops several participants indicated they used public transportation to access other parts of the city. The bus stops are in need of benches and coverings to make public transportation a more pleasant experience and in turn increase utilization. It was mentioned that the coteries are currently working on getting benches at bus stops. Also noted was inadequate public transit awareness. Many residents wanted more reliable busses, shorter wait times, and maps and route schedules at bus stops.

Local Assets

Bike paths were installed in certain streets

Desirable Elements

Covering for bus stops

More sidewalks and existing sidewalk repair – make handicap accessible

Buffer between car and pedestrians for safety

Safety measures for pedestrian Evangeline Thruway and railroad crossing

Connect Beaver Park and Heymann Park via pedestrian and bicycle paths

Reduce cut-through traffic on Orange Street

Challenges

Connectivity across Thruway and railroad is difficult and dangerous

“As long as they don’t elevate the street connecting to downtown we will come back.”

“Keep it pedestrian friendly.”

CONNECTOR-RELATED FEEDBACK

NOTES ON THE EVANGLINE THRUWAY (EXISTING & FUTURE USE)

Challenges, Concerns, and Existing Use

The Evangeline Thruway divided us into the right side and the wrong side.

It is hard to cross. There is too much traffic. It is dangerous. You have to go to a light.

Stop signs are really dangerous and it is really hard to cross. It can take 15 minutes to get across. You have to go to a light to cross. Needs to be an underpass on Johnston under the railroad tracks. You can't get to a hospital if a train is coming. Trucks are now using Louisiana Avenue off I-10 to get through/to Lafayette because there is better access.

How you see the Thruway today? –

Not safe to walk or bike when going to Downtown, Cameron St., Walmart.

The unemployment office in Freetown is difficult to access.

14th/Taft is a major crossing.

Louisiana is the major crossing to Downtown and Congress St.

The main business access in the neighborhood is on 12th, Louisiana, and Magnolia.

The Jefferson Street underpass is unsafe – we don't use it.

In terms of Connectivity...

The Thruway is not safe and is in bad condition.

Their destination is work, pedestrian crossing is not a safe option

Would like to be able to get to southside and Downtown via bus/bike

- Do not like driving on Thruway
 - Need road to be improved (structure bad for connection)
 - They use Ambassador to get to southside (will avoid Johnston St.)
 - They use St. Charles to get to Moss St.
 - Concerns of homeless @ Jefferson St. underpass area
 - Train tracks on Louisiana Ave. are in bad condition
 - Concern about lights @ Willow and crossing of Thruway currently
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Suggestions and Desires

Make Evangeline Thruway into parks. Turn Evangeline Thruway to one way and convert the other side to a bike and walking path. Put in some one-way streets.

Low speeds. Less crossings. Sidewalks. Bike trails. Parks for the kids. Let it fit the neighborhood. Let the big trucks stay on the interstate. Precincts underneath – increase public safety with police presence.

Regarding what will be left of the Evangeline Thruway: “bring it down to two lanes and a bike path or add a streetcar line.”

Need covered bus shelters.

- Two-way for future Evangeline Thruway not good – prefer to keep one way
 - Specific pedestrian Thruway crossings
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NOTES ON THE CONNECTOR INFRASTRUCTURE & OPTION CONCEPTS

General Concerns

"Noise study is a bunch of bologna. You can hear when the trucks change gears, so imagine when they go up ramps."

"DOTD just blows through"

Visual impact of I-49

Noise Abatement

Lowering speed limits – no speed higher than 55/60

Seclusion from the other side of the city

No crawfish columns

Cameras at Jefferson Street underpass

Open spaces under interstate(!?)

Leave high level and add better lighting

Visibility

Pathway along the corridor

Railroad is a huge obstacle – want as many underpasses as possible but would like to figure out, especially on Jefferson Street, how bikes and pedestrians can transverse. They worried about pedestrians going through a tunnel because of a recent accident where the cars ended up against a wall.

Relocation of taken homes(?)

Specific Connector Options Impact Concern

Stay at grade: 6th and Jefferson Sts. So we can "bring in bicycles and foot traffic"

"As long as they don't elevate the street connecting to downtown we will come back." "Keep it pedestrian friendly."

I-49 – favored 4-D concept. They like the grand boulevard concept with opportunities for retail/festival, public spaces, and pocket parks.

In terms of the off ramps planning for I-49: "Can't stand the thought of cutting off 6th street"

Neighborhoods don't want interchanges. Safety measures for crossing into Downtown, decrease concrete and footprint

Concerns about plan 4D and Feds paying for Thruway but not doing it right. I-49 will be designed by Fed standards but other parts of project can be designed by local standards(?)

Suggestions and Desires

- Street level human scale infrastructure will enable the re-connection
- Quiet zones for the railroad
- Vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic - mobility is important to crossing Evangeline
- Public art along the corridor (p. 43 Bluebook)
- Pedestrian gates for the railroad (prefer underpasses) for safety